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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR X0XX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Gaza Operation

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported that yesterday up to 45 Palestinians were killed and 55 wounded, in an IDF shelling of a UN school in Gaza. Major media cited the IDF's response that Hamas militants had fired from inside the school. HaQaretz reported that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees is demanding an independent

investigation and the indictment of anyone found to have violated international law. The media reported on two other incidents yesterday in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood, in which 33 residents were killed.

The papers prominently displayed the portraits of the five IDF servicemen killed yesterday and Monday. Among them was a soldier killed in a clash with Hamas.

Media reported that yesterday President-elect Barack Obama expressed deep concern about the loss of civilian lives in Gaza and Israel. The media reported on efforts to achieve a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas including mention of a new proposal from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Some media speculated that the U.S. and France are partners in this plan. Israel Radio reported that Mubarak invited PM Ehud Olmert to Egypt today to discuss the proposal. Yediot and other media reported that Mubarak will invite Israel and the Palestinians to an urgent meeting to form agreements and guarantees to make sure that the current escalation does not repeat itself. PM Olmert was quoted as saying in an interview with HaQaretz that Israel has no interest in a prolonged offensive in Gaza. The leading Internet news service Ynet reported that yesterday Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed her satisfaction with the Egyptian initiative and quoted her as saying at the UN Security Council that one should not return to the previous situation and that the cease-fire must be stable. Yediot reported that PM Ehud Barak is in favor of ending the war. Major media reported that the diplomatic security cabinet will discuss an expansion of the operation. Yediot and Israel Radio reported that Olmert is initiating a humanitarian corridor to Gaza.

Leading media reported that the Hamas leadership is hiding in Gaza's Shifa Hospital.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the incoming U.S. Congress is expected to consider a resolution backing Operation Cast Lead.

The media reported that yesterday a Grad rocket fired by Palestinian militants in Gaza struck Gedera, 30 km from Tel Aviv.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday President Shimon Peres told Czech FM Karel Schwarzenberg, Swedish FM Carl Bildt, and EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner that the EU must deliver a clear message to Hamas not to use children as human shields.

The Jerusalem Post quoted the New York-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as saying yesterday that the comparisons of Israel to Nazi Germany being made at protests worldwide against the IDF's Gaza operation are a cynical perversion of history that has no place in society. ADL national director Abe Foxman particularly deplored the fact that this comparison was being heard at demonstrations in the U.S. The media reported that yesterday in Ankara an angry crowd mobbed the Israeli basketball team BQnai Hasharon.

Israel Radio reported that yesterday, Venezuela expelled the Israeli Ambassador and his staff from Caracas. The radio reported that Israel is considering banishing the Venezuelan envoys.

HaQaretz reported on the discovery of a sweet water reservoir along Israel's coast, under the Mediterranean. The paper cited an estimate that the reservoir contains around 10% of Israel's annual water consumption.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Malcolm Honlein, Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, as saying in a conversation with the newspaper that the White House has informed his organization that President Bush is considering granting a pardon to the prisoner Jonathan Pollard.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday an Egyptian court upheld a ruling to annul a government agreement to export natural gas to Israel on concern that the fuel was sold at below-market prices.

HaQaretz reported that the police in central Israel have used an immigrant from the U.S. as a covert narcotics agent.

## ----- Gaza Operation: -----

### Summary: -----

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q[Under Obama, the U.S. will support Israel, but will oppose any harming of Palestinian civilians. This means that Israel will find it difficult to close the crossings into Gaza at will.

Former Ambassador to the U.S., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz: QMost of those Israeli politicians who speak of the need to stop our military activity before international pressure forces us to stop have precious little experience with the American political establishment.

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom: QThe government and the IDF apparently still have a few days, perhaps up to a week, to complete the task they set themselves when they launched Operation Cast Lead.

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Uri Elitzur, who was director of former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bureau, wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: QAnyone who fires mortar shells out of a school can't then cry about casualties among children and women in that same school.

Yossi Alpher, Co-Editor of the bitterlemons.org family of Israeli-Palestinian Internet publications and former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QIf Hamas's Gaza-based leadership and armed cadres can be significantly weakened and a blow struck against one of Iran's two Mediterranean bases, this operation will have to be considered a moderate success but not a decisive victory.

Block Quotes:  
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### I. "Obama's Warning to Israel"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/7): QIsrael's governing Qtroika met yesterday in order to find a way out of the conundrum Israel finds itself in, following the bombing of the school in Jabalya, where dozens of Palestinian civilians were killed. The character of the meeting had already been marked by the warning Israel received from U.S. President-elect, Barack Obama, who broke his silence on the fighting in Gaza and made it clear that he will have a great deal more to say after his inauguration. The announcement from the Bush White House that for the time being Israel could carry on its offensive was little consolation. Obama made it clear that starting on January 20 the rules of American involvement in the region will change, and his administration will be a lot more active in pushing the diplomatic process between Israel and the Arabs forward. Obama's timing, after the strike on the school, signals the direction the U.S. will turn in its attitude to the region: It will support Israel, but will oppose any harming of Palestinian civilians. This means that Israel will find it difficult to close the crossings into Gaza at will.

### II. "The Task at Hand"

Former Ambassador to the U.S., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens wrote in Ha'aretz (1/7): QThe understanding in much of the world, and especially in the United States, for Israel's security, and especially for its battle against terrorism, has grown considerably in recent years. The idea that Israel may face unbearable international pressure that would limit its response against terrorist forces has little basis in fact.... Most of those Israeli politicians who speak of the need to stop our military activity before international pressure forces us to stop have precious little experience with the American political establishment. Our job now is to keep our eye on the ball, and not

be diverted from the task at hand. The IDF must continue to pursue the mission it has been assigned and put an end to the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip. We have the ability to do so and it must be done. The consequences of failure, regardless of the explanations offered by Israeli politicians and the wording of the relevant UN Security Council Resolution, would bode very ill for Israel.

### III. "Not Qana"

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom (1/7): QThe pictures of [yesterdayQs] atrocity immediately circulated from Jabalya all over the world -- to the barely-concealed glee of Hamas -- and added oil to the spreading bonfire of protest against Israel, mainly in Europe and the Muslim world. However, a quick and efficient response by the IDF Spokesperson's Office last night saying that the IDF shell was fired in response to Hamas mortar shell fire managed to defuse at least some of the diplomatic damage that was liable to have been caused. As a result, and also as a direct consequence of Hamas's shaky standing in the international community, the incident in Jabalya will not lead to an immediate halt to Operation Cast Lead but will only expedite processes already in the works. American President-elect Barack Obama was forced yesterday, for the first time, to break his silence, American officials will have to try harder to obtain a QbalancedQ statement in the meeting that began last night at the UN Security Council in New York and the truly important meetings on the Washington-Jerusalem-Cairo-Paris route will also be sped up to reach an arrangement on the complex issues of preventing arms smuggling and on arrangements for the crossings. The government and the IDF apparently still have a few days, perhaps up to a week, to complete the task they set themselves when they launched Operation Cast Lead. A separate question is if they know what to do with the time, which despite everything, is still at their disposal.

### IV. "Hamas Is Responsible for The Deaths"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Uri Elitzur, who was director of former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bureau, wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (1/7): QEven though the awful pictures of injured and dead children were broadcast time and again by the Arab TV networks, Hamas has failed for the time being to elicit a global outrage similar to the one that was caused by the [1996] incident in Qana in Lebanon. Evidently, it isn't always true that a picture is worth a thousand words.... Just as the assertion that it is impossible to fight terror organizations successfully has been disproved, so too it is evident that the conventional wisdom that it is impossible to fight propaganda and there is nothing that can be done in the face of a picture of children casualties, has been refuted. Anyone who fires mortar shells out of a school can't then cry about casualties among children and women in that same school, and he places himself in mortal danger. That assertion, when it is spoken with self-confidence, is well-received in the world and even in the Arab world.

### 1V. QItQs All in How You Want to Define QVictory

Yossi Alpher, Co-Editor of the bitterlemons.org family of Israeli-Palestinian Internet publications and former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/7): QThe leadership in IsraelQs Sunni Arab state neighbors is torn among the sympathy for the plight of Palestinians, its anger with the militant Islamists, its fear of Iran, and its concern lest the Arab masses support Hamas, Hizbullah, and Iran.... If Hamas, riding on a wave of Palestinian and broader Arab sympathy, agrees to return to talks [with Fatah], it is important both for Israel and the moderate Arab leadership that it not be allowed to exploit them to ride to power in the West Bank as well. Few Israelis and Arabs hold out the hope that Operation Cast Lead will actually lead to the elimination of Hamas, whose true leadership is in Damascus and whose Palestinian supporters easily number in the hundreds of thousands. If HamasQs Gaza-based leadership and armed cadres can be significantly weakened and a blow struck against one of IranQs two Mediterranean bases, this operation will have to be considered a moderate success but not a decisive victory.

